GAZETTE DEC 1st 199

Denver council OKs registration for gay, lesbian unmarried pairs

By Barry Bortnick
The Gazette

DENVER — The city of Denver became only the second Colorado community to endorse a domestic-partnership registry, which allows nonmarried gay or straight couples to officially declare their unions.

The measure, which the Denver City Council passed by a unanimous vote Monday night, is largely symbolic. The registry carries no legal impact as a marriage might.

The concept lets nonmarried couples register their partnerships with the city. The listings can make it easier for nonmarried couples to obtained health benefits, provided their employers extend benefits to domestic partners.

Though a number of companies, including Coors and United Airlines, offer benefits packages to nonmarried partners, gay and lesbians see Denver's registry as a stamp of approval from government.

"This was one step to recognize our relationships," said Suzanne Banning, executive director of the Colorado Legal Initiatives Project, a gay and lesbian advocacy group. "We don't have any other legal standing, so this is very meaningful."

The registry is also important to elderly couples who live together but avoid marriage to protect their Social Security benefits.

It is less clear how the registry will affect local businesses. The Coors Brewing Co. has extended health benefits to domestic partners since 1995. The beer company employs 5,800 people, but only a small number have signed up as domestic partners even though the process is very simple.

"There is a form to sign that says: 'I am an employee and this is my partner.' All you do is document that partnership with common bank accounts," said Joe Fuentes, a Coors spokesman.

The push for a registry in Denver has been in the works for over a year. Denver's registry is a virtual copy of one adopted by the city of Boulder in 1996. Similar registries are on the books in about 37 cities from New Orleans to San Francisco.

The registry has raised concerns from some conservative groups that oppose additional rights for gays.

"It's silly and nonbinding and it is an attempt to throw a bone at the homosexual lobby and chips away at Colorado's marriage law," said Chuck Gosnell, president of the Christian Coalition of Colorado.

Gosnell of Colorado Springs predicted the registry would backfire and lead family-oriented citizens to pass a ban on same-sex marriages.

"The vast majority of Coloradans outside the bastions of liberalism in Denver and Boulder resent the homosexual minority's attempt to force their preferences on the rest of us," Gosnell added.

Registry advocates said they don't plan to expand the registry to other Colorado communities.

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How it works

Unmarried couples who wish to register in Denver can sign an affidavit declaring their union, pay a $25 fee and put their names on the list. The registry is open to couples in Colorado over 18 and sharing a household. The registry is not valid for blood relatives or married couples.

Scriptures Clergy Don't Use
Revelation 19:17-21 **What happens to all who listen to the clergy (11) in todays generation.**
Rec. Msg. 573-4055

...a rural community with all the urban amenities," Barela said.

But it's unclear whether that rosy picture will be preserved in The Times' article for the next 1,000 years. Copies of the five-page piece — part of the magazine's biggest issue in its 20-year history — won't be released until later this week.

Sometime next year, the six-part millennium series — one version on acid-free paper and another on a rosetta disk — will be placed in a human-size capsule to be preserved at the American Museum of Natural History.

Slice-of-life objects contributed by Fountain residents and others — writers, artists, researchers and the like — will form an exhibit at the museum through March. One of those, a Purple Heart, was donated by Ralph Nothstine. It's one of five he earned in Vietnam.

"When they (Times crew) came to my restaurant, they asked what I'd like to put in the capsule, and that was the first thing I thought of," he said. "I went through a lot of hell to receive them."

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